The Department of Music

of

The University of Alberta

presents

LILLIAN UPRIGHT

LECTURE/RECITAL

The History of the Prelude in Keyboard Music

Monday, November 14, 1983 at 8:00 P.M.
Convocation Hall, Old Arts Building

ORGAN PRELUDES

Praeambulum in C	Tablature of Adam Ileborgh, 1448
Praeambulum super G	Buxheim Organ Book, c. 1470
Praeambulum in re	Tablature of Leonhard Kleber, 1524
Intonazione Settimo Tono	Andrea Gabrieli (1510-1586)
Chorale Prelude, "Ich ruf' zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ" (1713-1717)	Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

HARPSICHORD PRELUDES

Praeludium in F Dorian	John Bull (1563-1628)
Prelude in G Minor	Jean-Henri d'Anglebert (1628-1691)
Prelude in A Minor (English Suite No. 2) (1715)	Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

PIANO PRELUDES

Preludes Op.28, Nos. 7, 2, 24 (1835)	Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849)
Preludes Vol. II (1910-1913) Canope General Lavine-eccentric	Claude Debussy (1862-1918)
Six Preludes (1942-1947) Allegretto--scherzando Andantino tranquillo Lento--come elegia Broad--in declamatory style Slowly--in sad meditation Allegro appassionato	Violet Archer (b. 1913)

This program is in partial fulfillment of the degree of D.Mus. for Ms. Upright

THE HISTORY OF THE PRELUDE IN KEYBOARD LITERATURE

PLAY PRAEAMBULUM IN C Adam Ileborgh

This is where it all began, the fashioning of the first keyboard prelude, at the key desk of some organ, possibly in the context of a liturgical service, somewhere in Europe during the 15th century.

The tiny prelude which I have just played from Adam Ileborgh's Tablature, was written while he was rector in Stendal, North Germany. While this is the earliest extant source, we cannot assume Ileborgh's to be the earliest or only preludes for organ, simply because of the very nature of these early preludes: they were improvisations.

Nor can we determine definitively how these preludes may have been used in the service, although the composers' indications of various pitches and modes would seem to suggest correlations between the preludes and the vocal music with which they could have been associated in the liturgy.

What sets these preludes apart from pre-existent organ music, and what probably prompted Ileborgh to label his as composed "secundum modernum modum" (that is, in a modern style), is that they are music specifically for keyboard, freed from vocal models and something altogether new, neither derived, nor arranged, nor adapted.

The Ileborgh Praeambulum is thus not only the earliest extant prelude for the keyboard; it is the earliest surviving composition to be written specifically for the keyboard. Ileborgh capitalizes on that characteristic unique to the keyed instruments: their array of pitches is all laid out before the player, and all we have to do is merely run our fingers up and down and around the keys. Thus, certain types of figurational material are associated with writing specifically for the keyboard. A second characteristic of this early prelude has already been alluded to: the improvisational quality that arises out of its unmetered rhythm. A third feature of this early prelude is its brevity; while there are exceptions to this characteristic, this is an aspect of the prelude as a genre which has held fairly constant to the present time.

The Buxheim Organ Book, dating from 1470, is another source of early organ preludes. They show a slight expansion in form over those in the Ileborgh Tablature, and, in this example, the juxtaposition of two different types of writing. Listen to the alternation of florid material with block chord progressions.

PLAY PRAEAMBULUM SUPER G Buxheim Organ Book

The pairing of these two writing styles brings to mind the Notre Dame School of vocal polyphony of the late

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2024 with funding from
University of Alberta Library

https://archive.org/details/miscconcertprogs00albe

12th and early 13th centuries with its clausulae in discantus style contrasted with florid melismas written over sustained tones. However, nowhere in these early organ pieces designated Praeambulum/Praeludium/Intonazione do we find a Cantus Firmus from the chant repertoire; additionally, the figurational patterns used are idiomatic to the keyboard, rather than indebted to vocal polyphony.

* * * * * * *

As we move into the 16th century, the unattached, multipurpose prelude begins to proliferate. In the preludes of German composers, Leonhard Kleber and Hans Kotter, a sense of harmonic direction is becoming more apparent, and the earlier improvisational style has given way to a more measured approach. Both chordal and figurational elements figure prominently in this little prelude of Kleber.

PLAY PRAEAMBULUM IN RE Leonhard Kleber

A survey of Italian sources of the same period reveals an interesting anomaly. A publication of Marcantonio Cavazzoni dating from 1523, Ricercari, Mottetti, Canzoni, contains the two earliest extant ricercari, which are actually designated as preludes to two of the motets! These rambling works, while not totally without elements of imitation, basically simply alternate sections of scale figurations with chordal

passages. Several other Italians also wrote prelude-type ricercari. However, by 1543 and the publication of Intavolatura per Organo by the nephew to Marcantonio, Girolomo Cavazzoni, the ricercare had assumed the characteristics usually associated with it, a sectional type of composition featuring several subjects treated successively in imitative counterpoint.

"Intonazione", to intone, was the designation given to the Italian organ prelude of the 16th century, a collection of which is found in the source, "Intonationi di Andrea Gabrieli, et di Giovanni suo nepote" (1593). Typically, they begin with sustained chords, and then combine these with rapid passage-work in alternating hands. They represent a progression from the earlier German preludes, both in terms of their length, and in their technical demands. Willi Apel, writing in The History of Keyboard Music to 1700 says: "Listening to this music evokes a festive mood . . . Like the polychoral motets of the Venetian School, these preludes reflect the aura of magnificance of the city and period in which they were written." Let me take you back to 16th century Venice and St. Mark's Cathedral.

PLAY INTONAZIONE SETTIMO TONO Andrea Gabrieli

It was also in 16th century Italy that the keyboard prelude spawned a new form, the toccata. An outgrowth of

the prelude, the toccata, too, features a quasi-improvisational style in its passages of rapid figuration. However, the form is greatly expanded to incorporate contrasting sections which include imitative material. Hence, the toccata may be seen as a merger of the old prelude with the contrapuntal ricercare. A parallel Enlgish form of the same period is the voluntary, two examples of which may be found in The Mulliner Book, a 16th century British keyboard source.

Before leaving the organ, I'd like to jump ahead, momentarily, to the 17 century and the advent, in Germany and the Netherlands, of the most universally used of all organ preludes, the chorale prelude. Unlike the earlier unattached preludes which have been discussed so far, the primary intent of the chorale prelude was probably to preface the congregational singing of the hymn tune on which it was based. The treatment of the chorale melody takes on an endless variety: it may be treated imitatively, phrase by phrase; it may be worked out as a 2-part canon; it may be heard in the inner voices or in the pedal; or, most commonly, it may appear as it does in this example, in the top voice, with embellishment. The ornamentation of the second part of this chorale prelude is by Dr. Hugh Bancroft, formerly organist of All Saints' Cathedral, and an instructor here in our Department of Music.

PLAY "Ich ruf' zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ" J.S. Bach

* * * * * * *

We return now to the 16th century and to England where an important school of composers for the virginal (the English name for harpsichord) was emerging. Prominent among these were such names as William Byrd, Orlando Gibbons and John Bull, and in their hands an idiomatic style of writing for the harpsichord gradually developed. In contrast to the musical examples for organ heard thus far, this is secular music where dances predominate. The main source, The Fitzwilliam Virginal Book (1550-1620), mistakenly known for some time as Queen Elizabeth's Virginal Book, also contains numerous preludes which retain the original improvisatory quality of the prelude.

(It is interesting to read a description of the prelude written by a writer of that period, Mace. He describes the prelude as "a piece of confused--wild--shapeless--kind of intricate play in which no perfect form, shape or uniformity can be perceived").

An indication that composers occasionally had in mind the prelude as a preface is seen in Byrd's title for No. 100, "Praeludium to Ye Fancie" (No. 52); both compositions are in the same key. While generally rather short in length, these early English harpsichord preludes make increasing demands on the virtuosity of the player.

Speaking to this point, the famous music historian, Charles Burney, writes in the introduction of the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book: "If her Majesty was ever able to execute any of the pieces that are preserved in a MS. which goes under the name of Queen Elizabeth's Virginal Book, she must have been a very great player, as some of the pieces are so difficult that it would hardly be possible to find a master in Europe who would undertake to play one of them at the end of a month's practise". I refuse to disclose how long I've been practising this.

PLAY PRAELUDIUM IN F--(DOR.) John Bull

* * * * * * * *

Turning now to the French school of clavecinists (the French designation for harpsichord is clavecin), it was in the hands of such 17th century composers as Louis Couperin and Jean-Henri d'Anglebert that a very interesting experiment regarding the notation of the prelude took place. With the so-called "prelude non-mesuré", the unmeasured prelude, orthodox indications of rhythm and meter were abandoned, with the undoubted purpose of generating a freer, more genuinely improvistory performance. The prelude non-mesuré consists almost entirely of a succession of whole notes, and slurs designed to indicate either:

1. a sustained, arpeggiated chord

2. something of ornamental significance
3. the isolation of sections of material, one from the other.

Shorter-valued notes which occur occasionally paradoxically do not call for a faster execution, but rather, an emphasis on fragments of melodic importance. Occasional bar lines are used to indicate the ends of musical sentences.

This rhythmically unmeasured notation (which had originated in lute preludes designed to test the tuning of the instrument before performance) was a short-lived experiment, abandoned in the early 18th century. Here is an example of the prélude non-measuré.

PLAY PRELUDE FROM SUITE IN G Jean-Henri d'Anglebert

One cannot leave the French claveçinists without failing to mention the name of Couperin "le Grand", François Couperin, in whom the French school reached its finest flowering. Couperin's treatise, "L'Art de Toucher le Claveçin" (1716), is the repository for his eight preludes, one for each key that is represented in his "Ordres" (sets of descriptive pieces and dances), the idea being that the prelude chosen would be followed by an optional grouping of several pieces, all in the same key. However, in declaring that these preludes could also be played without sequel, he was among the first to recognize

the independent prelude. In referring to these preludes as his "prose" (whereas his measured pieces he equates with poetry), Couperin stresses the vital role of rhythmic freedom and imagination in their execution, harkening back, once again, to the improvisatory roots of the prelude.

* * * * * * * *

Nearly all the preludes that have been discussed thus far have been short, improvisatory, "unattached" preludes, pieces probably with a prefatory function, to be sure, but with no specific sequent. However, with the emergence of two very important instrumental forms during the 17th and 18th centuries: the suite and the prelude and fugue, the function of the prelude becomes more specific: it is attached as the preface to a fixed sequent, and thus is born the "attached" prelude which holds sway until the full-fledged emergence of the independent prelude, beginning in the third decade of the 19th century.

(As is true in all attempts at demarcation, some inevitable overlapping takes place; unattached preludes persisted well into the 17th century; Bach wrote independent preludes for his son, Wilhelm Friedemann; the literature of the 19th and 20th centuries, on the other hand, is liberally dotted with preludes and fugues.

* * * * * * * *

The prelude and fugue pairing developed in Germany when the contrasting elements of the Italian toccata: brilliant figuration perhaps girded in block chords, and contrapuntal material, were separated into two distinct movements. Three Praeambula by the younger Jacob Praetorius (1586-1651) foreshadow the paired prelude and fugue. In these rudimentary prototypes, a short chordal section is succeeded by a fugue on a single subject, but the two are not separate movements. This bi-partite plan took different directions: Buxtehude greatly enlarged the dimensions by multiplying the number of alternating free/fugal sections to produce the full-scale German toccata; less unwieldy and more usual was the separation of the parts into two distinct movements.

It was a man with the imposing name of Johann Kasper Ferdinand Fischer whose Ariadne Musica (1702) set into motion an outpouring of keyboard literature that continues on into the 20th century. This collection of twenty short preludes and fugues, arranged in pairs of tonics in chromatically ascending order (but omitting majors and minors exceeding five sharps and four flats), foreshadows the two sets of preludes and fugues in each major and minor key by Johann Sebastian Bach, The Well-Tempered Clavier. It was thanks to his final refinement of equal temperament tuning (in which all semitones were made

equi-distant) that Bach could and did prove that composers could now use all keys.

It is difficult to generalize about the 48 preludes themselves. Obviously they are paired to the fugues which follow by virtue of their tonality; usually they conform to the "single affection" of the Baroque in the unified nature of their musical material; most often they are less substantial, compositionally, than the fugue which follows.

It was interesting, recently, to hear Glenn Gould's comments on preludes with fugues, his doubts about whether the fugue needs the prelude, and whether, indeed, the pairings really work all that well as a unity. While Bach never imposed upon the Prelude the need for a textual or motivic relationship with its Fugue, and while the combinations present two clearly separate affects, it is probably safe to say that the master knew what he was about in the yoking of each pair.

The variety of style and content to be found in the preludes bespeaks the limitless depth and breadth of Bach's powers of assimilation and inventiveness. To illustrate with but a few examples, we have the style brisé of the lute prelude (I, 1), a pastorale (I, 9), an arioso (I, 8), a toccata (I, 21), and a gigue (I, 13).

* * * * * * *

Whereas the prelude and fugue was a more exclusively German creation, keyboard composers from England, France and Germany all espoused the suite form, often prefacing it with an attached prelude. Seven of eight suites in Henry Purcell's "Choice Collection" (published 1696) are introduced by preludes which employ one figurative pattern throughout. Also from England, Handel's preludes to his harpsichord suites are generally short and figurational, employing scales and arpeggii, singly and in combination.

Handel's suites occasionally contain an introductory type of movement styled after the French "Ouverture" which had its origins in the orchestral music of Lully. Translated to the keyboard, this overture assumed a bi-partite structure in which a slow, perhaps rather pompous, chordal opening section, usually exploiting dotted rhythms, was followed by a faster fugal section. This introductory movement often appears in the suites of such French claveçinists as Louis Couperin and Jean-Henri d'Anglebert, as well as in one of the Germans suites or Partitas of J.S. Bach.

The differing titles of the introductory movements of all six of these Bach Partitas bear eloquent testimony to the difficulties encountered in disentangling all the strands of prefatory pieces. Besides an Ouverture, Praeludium, Praeambulum and Toccata to which reference has already been made, there is the Fantasia, a form that, in

its 16th century keyboard origins, was one of imitative counterpoint; by the 17th century the rhapsodic elements associated with it began to appear, and it became virtually indistinguishable from the toccata. But, having said all that, what's in a name, since the Fantasia which opens the third Partita is like a modest two-part invention, while the second introductory movement, the so-called Sinfonia, is, in reality, an expanded French Ouverture which includes a beautiful arioso between its outer sections.

This confusing state of affairs becomes beautifully simplified when we turn to Bach's French Suites; they have no praeludia, ouvertures, fantasias, sinfonias, toccatas or praeambula, but begin directly with the Allemande.

Turning to the preludes of Bach's six English Suites, we hear in the opening of number one an improvisatory flourish reminiscent of the prelude's origins, before Bach settles into a short, though-composed pastorale-type movement. The preludes to the remaining English Suites are quite a different matter. They are large, sectional structures, fashioned after the ritornello form of the Italin concerto. Bach, the incomparable assimilator has gathered many diverse strands: contrapuntal imitation, violinistic figurations, the use of episode and refrain, and even a brief improvisational flourish. Adam Ileborgh's little prelude is worlds removed from the

highly organized and cohesive form that we hear in this prelude to Bach's second English Suite.

You will notice that this prelude has been ambiguously placed on the program: it is apparently neither an organ, harpsichord nor piano prelude! Actually, it is a harpsichord composition; Bach at that time was unacquainted with the newly-invented piano. However, he knew that the viability of his music (unlike that of the French claveçinists) was not contingent on its medium, hence his designation of the 48 for keyed instruments as a class. I choose to use the piano because I feel that it is here that I can best realize the musical values of this Prelude.

PLAY PRELUDE IN A MINOR FROM ENGLISH SUITE NO. 2 J.S. Bach

* * * * * * *

PLAY PRELUDE IN A MAJOR, Op. 28, No. 7 Chopin

It's a giant leap, musically speaking, from the foot-stomping energy of the Baroque to the romantic elegance of Chopin's A Major prelude. What happened in between? No doubt performers were still improvising preludes, but composers were turning almost singlemindedly to the evolving classical sonata form. Beethoven did write two Preludes "through all the major keys", Op. 39, but

these are really didactic curiosities designed to illustrate modulatory technique. His choice of "prelude" as their title becomes something of a harbinger for the definition to be found in the Harvard Dictionary of Music: "Prelude (since 19th century): a non-committal title for a piano piece".

While the inspiration for Chopin's collection of 24 preludes, one in each major and minor key, undoutedly derives from Bach's precedent, their key arrangement is different: beginning with C major and its relative minor, he moves up the sharp keys, switching at F#major/E^{b}minor to the flat side and thus down to end with F major/D minor. This juxtaposition of nearly-related keys, plus, of course, Chopin's inventive genius, allows for a smooth linkage from prelude to prelude. For example, consider how he moves from No. 1 in C major to No. 2 in A minor. Because the A minor prelude begins on a sort of dominant to A (which is E), the final sound of the C major prelude is the E member of its tonic chord.

I chose to play the A Minor prelude because, harmonically speaking, it is the most forward-looking of the entire set. Even today, to ears that have been exposed to the ambiguities of post-romantic chromaticism, to say nothing of the 12-tone Viennese School of Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern, this little prelude of Chopin retains

its capacity to challenge our ears with its elusive harmonic language.

While Chopin's linkages enhance the performance of his Preludes as a set, they are most often used as parts of a homogeneous group of Chopin pieces in a recital program. They range from epigram (like the A Major just played), to such extended, demanding compositions as the D Minor soon to be heard. Prelude as preface has fallen by the wayside: it would be difficult to come up with an appropriate sequent to such an imposing and dramatic piece as Chopin's D Minor prelude, which is no doubt why it concludes the set.

PLAY Preludes in A Minor and D Minor, Op. 28 Chopin

* * * * * * * * *

The Chopin Preludes are the prototype for the poliferation of collections of independent preludes which have followed in their wake. The prelude has become a characteristic piece, usually expressing a single mood which is conveyed by the exploitation of a short figure or motif through various harmonies. It was actually Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1778-1837) who composed the first set of preludes through all the keys, and others to follow suit were Heller, Alkan, Cui, Busoni, Shostakovich and Scriabin. (The latter actually wrote a total of ninety preludes!) Limitations of time regretfully don't allow the playing of

any of these, nor of the remarkably fine preludes of Rachmaninoff, to whom, along with Martin, Martinu, Perle, Ginastera and Chavez, I can pay only lip service tonight.

* * * * * * *

Debussy's Preludes, two sets of twelve each, are unique to the prelude literature in 2 ways: they are program music (dependent for their inspiration on something extra-musical), and their structures tend to be fragmented rather than all of one piece. Debussy, who enigmatically places his titles at the close of these preludes, shows the breadth of his background in their sources of inspiration: literature (homage à S. Pickwick), Greek antiquity (Danseuses de Delphes), medieval legend (La Cathédrale Engloutie), nature (Brouillards), to name but a few. In Canope (an Egyptian burial urn), a ceremonial procession gives way to several other images before it is once again recalled; General Lavine is the awkward clown of les Folies-Bergère, and his disconnected cake-walk is portrayed in a series of violent contrasts in tempi, dynamics, mood.

PLAY Canope and General Lavine-eccentric Debussy

* * * * * * *

A source of great pleasure for me in the preparation of this lecture-recital has been in the opportunity it has afforded me to do research with the composer herself, Dr. Violet Archer.

This cycle of Preludes (and they are meant to be played as a set), grew out of the feelings which World War II engendered in Dr. Archer. Her deep emotional reactions to the holocaust, and to her own loss of personal friends and contemporaries on the battlefields, led to the portrayal of the successive moods we hear in the six preludes.

First to be composed was number three, a lament to the dead and the core of the set. Number one, a breezy scherzando, reflects the noncholance of Poulenc, whose musical idiom was an important influence at that time. The second prelude serves to bridge the diametrically opposed moods of one and three. Number four is a declamation of great drama and power, while the meditative quality of number five is a retrospection of the earlier elegy. The final prelude is an impassioned declaration which (to my mind) expresses the conviction that man's inhumanity to man, somehow and some way, must and will cease.

When I asked Dr. Archer why she had chosen the designation "prelude", she cited the historical practise of assembling short works to create larger unities, particularly Bach's 48 Preludes and Fugues, and Chopin's Preludes, Op. 28. The initially-composed Elegy could not be programmed on its own, hence her decision to arrange a series of moods to encircle it.

The prelude has thus emerged from its early boundaries as a brief preface into a genre whose only limitations lie in the creative imagination of the composer who chooses to use it-----which is no doubt the reason that preludes abound in the literature, and will no doubt continue to do so.

PLAY Six Preludes Violet Archer